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ABSTRACT

This digest discusses the issue of school-based management (SBM), defined as a system of administration in which the school is the primary unit of educational decision making. Responsibility for certain decisions about the budget, personnel, and the curriculum is placed at the school level rather than the district level. Several aspects of SBM are covered in question-and-answer format: (1) What are some of the advantages of SBM? (2) How does SBM affect the roles of the school board, superintendents, and district office? (3) How are the budget decisions made? (4) How are the decisions made at the school level? (5) What is necessary when implementing SBM? and (6) What are the liabilities of SBM? Appended are 10 references. (SI)

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SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

By Kathleen Kubick

School-based management (SBM) is an alternative to the typical pattern of school district governance that centralizes authority in the district office. As John Lindelow and James Heynderickx (forthcoming) define it, SBM "is a system of administration in which the school is the primary unit of educational decision-making." Responsibility for certain decisions about the budget, personnel, and the curriculum is placed at the school level rather than the district level, thereby giving especially principals but also teachers, students, and parents greater control over the educational process.

What are some of the advantages of school-based management?

A task force convened by the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1988) identified nine advantages, several of which are listed below. School-based management

- formally recognizes the expertise and competence of those who work in individual schools to make decisions to improve learning
- gives teachers, other staff members, and the community increased input into decisions
- improves morale of teachers
- focuses accountability for decisions
- brings both financial and instructional resources in line with the instructional goals developed in each school
- nurtures and stimulates new leaders at all levels
- increases both the quantity and the quality of communication

Each school's flexibility to meet the needs of its students leads to greater creativity in the design of programs.

Budgeting also becomes markedly more realistic. Lindelow and Heynderickx state that schools no longer need to lobby with the central office for funds. Instead of requesting more money than is needed (with the hope of receiving a lesser amount that is sufficient to meet needs), schools receive a "lump sum," based on a formula, that they can spend as they see fit. Parents and teachers become more aware of the cost of programs, the school's financial status, and its spending limitations.

How does SBM affect the roles of the school board, superintendent, and district office?

The school board's role changes little in a conversion to SBM. "School-based management does not change the legal governance system of schools," says the AASA/NAESP/NASSP task force. "School boards do not give up authority by sharing authority." The board continues to set broad policies and establish a clear and unifying vision for the district and the schools.

The superintendent and district office staff serve to facilitate the actions being taken at the school level. Their role is to explain the academic and budgetary goals as well as provide technical assistance when a school has difficulty translating the district's vision into high-quality programs. The development of student and staff performance standards and evaluation of the schools (using students' test results, visits to classrooms, and random questionnaires) are also the responsibility of the district staff.

The district office also recruits potential employees, conducts the initial screening of job applicants, and maintains information on qualified applicants, from whom the schools fill their vacancies.

In the area of curriculum, the district office specifies goals, objectives, and expected outcomes and then leaves it up to the schools to determine the methods for producing the desired results. Some districts leave the choice of texts and materials to the schools, whereas others, to maintain districtwide curriculum standards, require schools to use common texts.

How are budget decisions made?

In most SBM systems, each school is given a "lump sum" that the school can spend as it sees fit. In a budgeting process outlined by JoAnn Spear (1983), the district office determines the total funds needed by the whole district, determines the districtwide costs (such as the cost of central administration and transportation), and allocates the remaining funds to the individual schools. The allocation to each school is determined by a formula that takes into account the number and type of students at that school. Often the district is responsible for purchasing and warehousing supplies and equipment specified by the schools.

Each school determines how to spend the lump sum allocated by the district. Funds can be spent on personnel, equipment, supplies, and maintenance. The school's instructional and administrative priorities are expressed through its budget priorities. Surplus funds can be carried over to the next year or be shifted to a program that needs more funds; in this way, long-range planning and efficiency are encouraged.

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How are decisions made at the school level?

Most districts create school-based management councils at the school sites. Each council includes the principal, representatives of parents and teachers, and, in some cases, other citizens, support staff, and students (at the secondary level). The council conducts a needs assessment and then develops a plan of action that includes statements of goals and measurable objectives. According to Carl Marburger (1985), the council is not a little school board but helps determine how the school implements school board policies.

In some districts, the school-based management council makes most school-level decisions. In other districts, the council advises the principal, who then makes the decisions. In both cases, the principal has a large role in the decision-making process, either as part of a team or as the final decision-maker.

What is necessary when implementing SBM?

From the beginning, the school board and superintendent must be supportive of school-based management. They must trust the principals and councils to determine how to implement the district's goals at the individual schools.

It is important to have a memorandum of agreement that specifies the roles and responsibilities of the school board, superintendent, principal, and SBM council. The agreement should explicitly state the standards against which each school will be held accountable. James Guthrie (1986) states that each school should produce an annual performance and planning report covering "how well the school is meeting its goals, how it deploys its resources, and what plans it has for the future."

Training in such areas as decision-making skills, problem-solving, and group dynamics is necessary for all participating staff and community members, especially in the early years of implementation. To meet the new challenges of the job, principals may need additional training in leadership skills.

What are the liabilities of SBM?

Participatory decision-making sometimes creates frustration and is often slower than more autocratic methods. The council members must be able to work together and concentrate on the task at hand.

Council members must spend time on planning and budget matters, leaving principals and teachers less time to devote to other aspects of their jobs. Not all teachers will be interested in the budget process or want to devote time to it. Those teachers and community members who participate in the councils may need training in budget matters.

Members of the school community must beware of expectations that are too high. According to the AASA/NAESP/NASSP task force, districts that have had the most success with SBM have focused their expectations on two benefits: increasing involvement in decision-making and making better decisions.

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